

# Supporting the design and construction sector to implement minimum accessible standards for new homes

## Research Summary

### About the research

This [new research](#) sought to understand the perspectives of practicing design and construction professionals in delivering new housing in Australia to integrate accessible design standards.

Research participants were involved in detailed one-on-one interviews to deeply understand their perspectives. Research participants had from 12 to 40 years experience in the industry, and included 6 builders, 5 registered architects, 2 building developers and 3 access consultants

This research provides new evidence about what the design and construction sector needs to successfully implement mandatory accessibility standards as outlined in the 2022 National Construction Code [Livable Housing Design Guidelines Silver Standard](#).



### Why is this research important?

- This research provides critical insights into what the sector designing and building new housing needs from their industry bodies and government to successfully implement accessibility standards.
- This research is directly informed by professionals in the design and construction sector about what is required to make this happen.
- The mandatory National Construction Code specifies 7 liveable and accessible standards to ensure all new homes are accessible. These are:
  1. Level access entryways
  2. One step-free entrance to the home
  3. A step-free shower recess
  4. A toilet on the ground (or entry) level that provides easy access.
  5. Wall reinforcement around the toilet for future grab rail installation
  6. Internal doors and corridors that facilitate movement between spaces
  7. Stairways designed to reduce chance of injury and for future adaptation.
- Accessible housing is a mainstream issue and crucial for meeting the needs of Australians with mobility impairments, including older people and people with disability. Nearly 3 million older Australians live with a mobility limitation and by 2060 it is estimated this number will grow to 5.75 million due to a rapidly ageing population.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CIE (2021). *Proposal to include minimum accessibility standards for housing in the National Construction Code: Decision regulation impact statement*. Centre for International Economics.

## Key findings from the research

### There is building momentum for change

- Design and construction professionals reported the foundational work undertaken over many years means there is increased awareness of the importance of accessible design.
- Participants also spoke about how terminology is evolving in the sector with a shift towards accessible design as relevant for people at all stages of life and not just an issue for people with disability.
- The design and construction sector say accessible building design is achievable:  
*“I think builders, if they realise it’s not that hard, and they can get a really great outcome for their clients, I think they’ll be on board with it.” Architect*  
*“Reputable designers and developers know that there are solutions to these problems.” Building developer*

The research also found there were some challenges the industry is currently facing, which will need to be supported by governments and their professional bodies to ensure the mandatory standards are well implemented. This includes:

### Supporting the industry who are facing competing demands

- Assisting them with the demands for compliance which could cause regulation fatigue.
- Without good support, there is potential overwhelm of the industry, impacting on their ability to implement mandatory accessible guidelines.

### Assisting the sector who are navigating practice in an uncertain environment

- There is a need to educate clients and other stakeholders about the benefits of accessible design and fit-for-purpose housing across the lifespan.
- Capacity building is needed for the building and design sector, including smaller companies and those self-employed.
- There is currently insufficient guidance and information to support the implementation of accessible design and a lack of consistency across information sources, and this should be addressed

For the detailed findings read the full report [here](#).

## What sustainable and practical solutions did professionals say are needed to assist the design and construction sector

### Whole of government and industry responsibility for the oversight of the implementation of minimum accessible design by:

- A central body overseeing implementation across all stakeholders such as architects, builders, suppliers and professionals working in the sector
- Engagement by all stakeholders to ensure industry relevance
- An industry-specific approach to education and training of relevant stakeholders
- Mainstream marketing of and education on accessible design across the broader community to raise awareness

### Developing and disseminating consistent, practical and accessible resources containing industry-relevant information, including:

- Lists of compliant products and suppliers
- Case study exemplars of accessible design, including drawings and templates (e.g. CAD blocks)
- Workshops, professional development opportunities, and ‘how to’ materials

## What’s next

- Informed by this research, governments and industry bodies need to work to support the design and construction industry to implement the mandatory accessibility requirements for new homes, with a strong preference from the design and building sector for a cross-industry approach
- All Australian governments commit to:
  - National adoption of the standards, through Western Australia and New South Wales signing up to the standards
  - Measuring the impact of the reforms on the supply of accessible housing and the benefits for consumers